Bruce Bairnsfather Found a Better 'Ole and 'Opped to It

Fame for a Man Who Laughed

Success, After Long Eluding Him, Sought Him in a Dugout

THE BAIRNSFATHER CASE. by Bruce Bairnsfather and W. A. Mutch. Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

RUMOR is generally wrong, or only half right, which is even more misleading. Take the case of Bruce Bairnsfather, the man who made the world laugh at the lowest ebb of human happiness.

They called him the soldier-artist. To amuse himself while the Huns were tossing over the proverbial tons of lead, he drew pictures on the walls of his dugout. He had never drawn a picture before in his life. It was the war and the nearness to death that inspired his fingers. His comrades told him it was great stuff. He ought to copy some of it off and send it to the papers. He did and a check came back. Then more pictures and more checks. . . . He became a millionaire artist.

As Rumor Has It

That was the accredited story of how Fragments From France came to be. Accredited to whom? We are not sure. Rumor always conceals its source.

The real story of the celebrated war cartoonist is set forth in The Bairnsfather Case, as tried before Mr. Justice Busby, with the defense by Bruce Bairnsfather and the prosecution by W. A. Mutch. The whole horrid truth of Bairnsfather's career is bared to the public for the first time—he became a famous artist because all his life he tried to be one! For years he struggled at art schools and at home by himself. There was no magic to his success; it was a mere matter of hard work. While these plain truths may shatter the news value of the Bairnsfather story, they had to come out sooner or later, and we, for one, are glad that it was not left to another generation for an erudite scholar to rise up and proclaim:

"Bruce Bairnsfather became an artist because he tried to be one."

It is far better to face these things in the present and make the best of them. For, after all, fame is fame, no matter how one gets there.

Biography and Autobiography

The Bairnsfather Case reveals step by step the course of events which brought the artist from obscurity to the pinnacle of his fortunes. In effect, the book is a double-barreled account of Bairnsfather's life, biography alternating with autobiography, and the whole relieved by some amusing sketches that follow the context only in spirit.

Although none of the material is served with any literary flavor, the autobiography is accomplished with the lighter touch. Mr. Mutch, the biographer, loses himself in the glory of his subject and flounders about in a mass of superlatives. Overwhelmed with Bairnsfather's success, he becomes almost incoherent in his praise and pride of the man.

We are willing to admit that Bairnsfather stands at the head of the class as a humorous war artist, and that he did exceedingly well with his timely dramatic piece, "The Better 'Ole." We suspect that the royalties from the film rights of the play made a tidy fortune in themselves. But as for believing that Bairnsfather will make a name for himself as a landscape painter or that he will unseat Barrie or Shaw as a dramatist, we are strictly a nonconformist.

A Suspicious Jingling

Bairnsfather makes no such claims for himself. He leaves all the ballyhooing to Mr. Mutch and touches only the diverting moments of his life. And does it rather modestly, too. Except for a faint jingling sound emanating from his trousers pocket, one might never imagine that he had achieved world renown.

With a fine sense for the fitness of things, he starts his story at the very beginning:

"In the year 1887 the birthrate in India went up by one—that was me. The last Himalayan glacial age was drawing to an apex when I was evolved; in other words, I was Homo Damnuisensis, or Sub-Man. Anyway, there I was born at an altitude of umpteen thousand feet in the Himalayas. I think my mother hid me from my father for some time, but my presence leaked out later, and they gave me a name to put at the bottom of my drawings."

Here we think it well to quote Mr. Mutch, who at times is useful as a mere historian:

"At the blackest moment of the Great War, when Britain was really downhearted about the issue, there appeared in The English Bystander a picture over the title, 'Where Did That One Go To?' This picture was followed by another from the same unknown artist, and the title of the second picture was 'They've Evidently Seen Me.' Soon afterward a third picture, 'We Are Staying at a Farm,' made the British public realize that a new star had risen in the firmament of art. People sat up and took notice. This phenomenon was simply incredible."

The Artist Explains

But Bairnsfather explains all this.

"I was born with the complaint," he writes. "My mother little knew the trouble she had brought into the world. I preferred pencils to rattles, even as far back as those nebulous days when I crawled about on all fours in our Himalayan home. I mention this fact because I don't think any one can survive the devastating disappointments and maintain the kinetic energy needed for success, unless he arrived on the globe almost holding a B B pencil in his hand."

Being the son of an army officer, Bairnsfather was sent to an army college, Westward, Ho! where he was taught, among other things, Latin, chemistry and Roman history.

"There is nothing like chemistry for an army officer," he comments. "Think of the enormous advantage of being able to say over to yourself in the middle of a battle, Zn plus H_2SO_4 equals $ZnSO_4$ plus H_2.

"You can't imagine what a comfort it is.

Chemic Comfort

"Or say the dreadnoughts are all in line and the rival fleet is putting twelve-inch umbrella stands through the port jib, or the conning tower, think! just think for a moment, the aid you get in this hour of dire need by being able to mutter MnO_2 plus $4HCl$ equals $MnCl_2$ plus $2H_2O$ plus Cl_2.

"It's incalculable."

After school and a short term of service in the army he resigned his commission and took up art as a serious profession. He bent all his energies on a course of instruction in art technique and expected to make his living in commercial art when he was graduated. But it turned out to be all struggle and no living. He had to seek an ordinary position as an electrical engineer to keep things going.

"I have nothing to say against engineering," he writes of this experience "but I feel that engineering, if the question was put to it, might have a lot to say against me.

"I went into the job with full-hearted endeavor to do my best at it, but I feel somehow that engineering did the dirty on me by starting me at £1 a week. You can't dress well, live and motor on £1 a week without a lot of care. . . .

"Every evening and every week end I would draw and paint with frenzy, in the hopes of extricating myself into art and more than £1 a week."

But the war found him still an electrician. He enlisted on August 5, 1914, and "regretted this act on August 6, 1914." The first Fragment was conceived in Flanders in January, 1915, and others followed this closely. Bairnsfather was wounded in the Battle of Ypres and returned to England for a convalescence. He never went back to the trenches. The War Office, realizing the moral stimulus of his pictures to the soldiers of the line, gave him a permanent detail of making Fragments.

Which was once, as many have expressed it, when the British War Office blundered into doing the right thing at the right time.

BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER'S drawing of his famous character, Old Bill

Life in Mars

Another Fascinating Tale by Edgar Rice Burroughs

THUVIA, MAID OF MARS. By Edgar Rice Burroughs. Published by A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago.

MR. BURROUGHS is as resourceful as his invincible hero, Tarzan of the Apes. In his novels of life on the planet of Mars he gives us not only rattling good adventure stories, but lessons in Martian history, geography and science. So we are introduced to red men, green men, white apes and other uncanny monsters. We shudder at the roaring of the banth, a species of Martian lion, equipped with ten legs, several rows of needle-like fangs and two huge protruding green eyes. We marvel at the speed and endurance of the thoat, a green third cousin to the horse, "ten feet high at the shoulder, with four legs on either side." We profoundly envy a race which is capable of dispensing with subways by moving about in airplanes, which they are able to stop automatically at any given point.

In this realm of strange men and strange beasts, the beautiful Thuvia, Princess of Ptarth, and her lover, Carthoris, Prince of Helium, pass through a series of amazing adventures. Kidnapping Thuvia is a favorite sport of all the bad men of Mars, and she is extricated from one thrilling situation after another by the matchless valor and swordsmanship of her lover. One of the most interesting creations of Mr. Burroughs's imagination is the race of Lotharians. These people are apparently hypnotic experts of extraordinary power. By concentrating their mental powers they are able to conjure armies of phantom warriors to fight in their defense. In the city of Lothar it is impossible to tell a ghost from a living being.

Eventually, of course, Carthoris and Thuvia are united in the presumably happy bonds of Martian wedlock. The story of their remarkable adventures is another triumph of the author's fictional genius, and it will doubtless be welcomed by the hosts of readers, old and young, who have reveled in Tarzan and the earlier Martian stories.

Another Forsyte

Galsworthy Introduces Jon, Son of Jolyon

AWAKENING. By John Galsworthy. Illustrated by R. N. Sauter. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

AWAKENING, by John Galsworthy, is an exquisite story of a little boy's passage from babyhood to adolescence. To readers who have accompanied Mr. Galsworthy through the lives and realms of the Forsyte family, in A Man of Property, Indian Summer of a Forsyte, in the Five Tales, and In Chancery, this study of little Jon, the child of not-so-young Jolyon and Irene, who was once the wife of Soames, is the quintessence of all that went before. Just as development, culture and breeding make for finer products in the race or the family, so the more Galsworthy writes about these Forsytes the more artistic his work becomes.

For those who have not met any of this numerous and diverse family, which is, after all, only a sort of summing up or condensing of the English people, endowed with the weaknesses as well as the sturdy qualities of the British and with enough members to allow for the principal variations of the English character, Awakening will be the best sort of an introduction. Like the novels, this story of little Jon may stand alone. It will even be liked by readers who may not have cared for the other stories of the Forsytes, if such there be. Scribners has published Awakening in a gift edition with illustrations by R. N. Sauter. The story is a story of a child written for grown-ups. The illustrations are also child illustrations for grown-ups.

The Light of the World

THE volume issued by Henry Holt & Co. transfers Guy Bolton and George Middleton's play, "The Light of the World," from the ephemeral world of the stage to the more durable one of the bookshelf. The play sets forth a paraphrase of the episode of the Magdalene story in modern form. The play, which is laid in Oberammergau, centers around a village carpenter who aspires to play the Christus in the "Passion Play." On the eve of the play he harbors a wandering Magdalene, and the ancient episode repeats itself. The play belongs to that school which, of recent years, proves the fine dramatic effectiveness of modernized instances in the life of Christ.

Two Books of Travel

ENGLISH WAYS AND BYWAYS. By Leighton Park. Published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

THE SPELL OF BRITTANY. By Ange M. Mosher. Published by Duffield & Co.

FOR those who prefer or are obliged to take their travels at the fireside there are two interesting volumes, English Ways and Byways, by Leighton Park, and The Spell of Brittany, by Ange M. Mosher. A clergyman and his wife make an automobile tour of the English countryside and in their letters home record their amusing if placid observations on English manners and customs, with the proper American appreciation of their picturesqueness and ordered charm.

Since the beginning of its discovery by the American tourist the quaintness of Brittany has been somewhat excessively advertised. Mrs. Mosher appears to have more than the casual tourist's interest in Brittany.

America of the Sixties

IT IS not often that a novel gives unpretentiously a true picture of the backwaters of American life. Although it is rural America of the '60s and '70s that Evelyn Schuyler Schaeffer pictures in Isabel Stirling (Scribner), it has even for the reader of to-day an air of unfeigned conviction and sincerity.

Isabel Stirling is a child brought up in the austerity of a bleak, Puritanic household. In spite of this gray background there is a good deal of spirit and charm in the pictures of this childhood. The solemn little girl discovering her solemn universe, the growing child, sensitive, vivid, imaginative, coming up against the iron repressiveness of her harsh old clergyman father, the adolescent girl chafing against the cramped ways of young ladyhood in the '60s—these are sketches of delicacy.

Miss Schaeffer does not do so well with the later life of Isabel Stirling—though the prim village festivities of the period are delightful and army post life in the '70s are colorful. But if she has not sustained Isabel Stirling to the end she has given us the picture of the ingrown father and stepmother as proof of a gift for characterization rather better than the common.